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FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0372  
INFO EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE  
WESTERN HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS DIPL POSTS IMMEDIATE  
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE  
RHMFISS/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CARACAS 000101

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

AMEMBASSY ANKARA PASS TO AMCONSUL ADANA  
AMEMBASSY ASTANA PASS TO AMCONSUL ALMATY  
AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL DUSSELDORF  
AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL LEIPZIG  
AMEMBASSY BELGRADE PASS TO AMEMBASSY PODGORICA  
AMEMBASSY HELSINKI PASS TO AMCONSUL ST PETERSBURG  
AMEMBASSY ATHENS PASS TO AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI  
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK  
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG  
AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN PASS TO AMEMBASSY GRENADA  
AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PASS TO AMCONSUL QUEBEC  
AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PASS TO AMCONSUL RECIFE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2020/01/28

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [VE](#)

SUBJECT: Three Cable Stations Reopen, Student Protests Continue

REF: 10 CARACAS 89; 10 CARACAS 75; 09 CARACAS 1287

CLASSIFIED BY: DUDDY, AMBASSADOR, DOS, AMB; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

11. (SBU) Summary: Three of the smaller cable channels closed as a result of the government's January 21 decision to reclassify them as "national" (ref a) were back on the air on January 27 following their successful appeal to Conatel, the broadcasting regulatory agency, to be reclassified as "international broadcasters." RCTV, the most important of the six channels affected by the decision, will not appeal to Conatel (septel) and remains off the air. Relatively small student protests continued in support of RCTV on January 26-27, with a group of students in Caracas succeeding in meeting with the President of the state-owned Venezuelan Television (VTV) and broadcasting an appeal for balanced news reporting and an end to polarization and name-calling. End Summary.

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Three Channels Back on the Air  
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12. (SBU) On January 26, Mario Seijas, the president of the cable television association, announced that three channels classified by Conatel as "national producers" had been reclassified as "international broadcasters" based on newly-submitted documentation; cable operators were thereby free to restore these channels -- Ritmo Son, American Network, and TV Chile -- to their programming on the same frequencies they had previously used. (Note: RCTV International, America TV, and Momentum remain off the air. See septel for report on Charge's meeting with RCTV President Marcel Granier, who said he had no intention of either resubmitting documentation to reclassify as an "international producer" or to register as a "national" producer. End Note.)  
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## Government Insists It Did Not Close Any Stations

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13. (SBU) In January 26 remarks to the National Assembly, Diosdado Cabello, Minister of Housing and Public Works and head of Conatel, again insisted that the state had not closed any media networks, but had simply required all broadcasters to comply with the law. Cabello alleged that "they are trying to manipulate" the facts and claimed that RCTV "has 94% national production, 100 % of the advertisements are national so that they can hardly be called international. In Peru and the United States they have to comply with laws, but in Venezuela they want to ignore the laws, like on April 11, 2002, and some allow themselves to be confused. The law must be strictly followed. If they don't like Venezuela, they can go someplace else." Referring to U.S. statements of concern about the closure of RCTV, Cabello commented, "The gringos are always worried, but why don't the gringos let Telesur broadcast in the USA? Who is censoring whom?" (Note: Telesur is the GBRV-funded television network that broadcasts to ALBA countries. End Note.)

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Symbolic Victory by Caracas Students  
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14. (SBU) On January 26, students from Caracas-area universities marched to the headquarters of pro-government VTV despite efforts by pro-Chavez militants to block them. Students circumvented a police barricade near the exits of the Central University of Venezuela (UCV), held a moment of silence for the two students killed in Merida (ref b), and re-routed their march several times to avoid pro-Chavez demonstrators. VTV station President Yuri Pimentel agreed to meet with a 5-student delegation, headed by student leader Roderick Navarro, to discuss the station's lack of coverage of student protests. Following the meeting, Navarro told viewers in a live broadcast on VTV, "We came here to discuss reality in this country." Navarro called for balanced news coverage and asked the media to stop dividing the country, saying "we expect the Venezuelan society to be respected; to stop polarization in the country; to stop saying that insecurity only affects opponents instead of Chavez' supporters, because it is everybody's problem. They must broadcast news about the lack of water and energy." Navarro continued: "We want, as young Venezuelans, that VTV stop telling lies, that we are piti-yanquis (little Yankees). We hope that they will carry our images on VTV. We don't want to follow the agenda of violence. You have to reflect the reality of the country."

15. (SBU) Following the station's rare coverage of student protestors, VTV interviewed PSUV student Carlos Sierra, who said, referring to the opposition students, "They need to leave VTV in peace" and accused them of representing the far right wing of the political spectrum.

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Protests Continue Across the Country  
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¶6. (U) Student protests over the closure of RCTV International and the January 25 killing of two students in Merida continued across Venezuela on January 26-27. According to press reports, in Anzoategui, at the University of Santa Maria, four students were injured when police and National Guard troops fired rubber bullets and tear gas at protesters attempting to block a roadway. The media reported that two police suffered burns from Molotov cocktails, and a third was injured in the leg. In Maturin, demonstrations were reportedly broken up by police and National Guard troops at Santiago Marina Poly-Technical University and the University of the West.

¶7. (SBU) The press reported that in Aragua, students burned effigies at the Experimental Pedagogy Liberator University and a caravan of student protesters in buses from the Carabobo University -Maracay branch unsuccessfully attempted to block the major East-West (Caracas-Valencia) highway. In Lara State, students from the University of Fermin Tolo chanted, "One, two, three, Chavez has struck out," while demonstrators in Barinas reportedly burned tires and carried placards and banners reading, "water, light, and crime... Chavez has struck out." In Nueva Esparta (Margarita

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Island), the press reported that protests were largely peaceful.

¶8. (C) Comment: The government response to the student protests has generally been relatively restrained so far. The protests themselves are much smaller than the large-scale street protests following the closure of RCTV in 2007. The government's decision to reclassify three cable stations so that they could go back on the air provides a facade of procedural legitimacy for a process widely seen as a targeted attack against opposition-oriented RCTV International. End Comment.  
CAULFIELD